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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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When is the world going to take terrorism seriously? The U.S. and its allies need to do its best reduce groups like ISIS to the size of a pimple! These terrorists have no soul, executing an innocent U.S. journalist barbarically! And Obama has the nerve to speak out against these groups while he was responsible for freeing terrorists recently in return for a "kidnapped" U.S. soldier. Hmmm, I thought that we didn't negotiate with terrorists! So much for taking a stance! Here's hoping that remaining captives are released unharmed, but hope in that regard seems to be waning.

Until next time...

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Hatari, Version 1.8.0 2014-07-30

Hatari 1.8.0 has been released. You can download it from http://download.tuxfamily.org/hatari/1.8.0 Thanks to all the people who contributed to this version with code, ideas, bug reports. Let's keep on improving Hatari !

Huge improvements to the FDC emulation
Support for STX files on any OS (with Hatari's own open source code), as well as support for IPF/CTR files
Write support for STX files, using .wd1772 files
Some various fixes to the video emulation
Many changes to the CPU related to prefetch
Some fixes to STE sound (microwire and LMC) and to Falcon sound
Some fixes to Gemdos HD emulation : clip filenames, autostart
Some fixes to ASCI HD : larger image, improve some commands
Changes to the UI : 2nd line of information at the bottom, better performances under SDL, more options in some screens
For developpers : more Natfeats commands, better tracing of OS calls (bios, xbios, ...), many additions to the debugger

See release-notes.txt for more details.

Fixed Games: Batman The Movie, Chart Attack Compilation, Darkman, Dragon

Flight, International 3D Tennis, Leavin’ Teramis loader text, Lethal Xcess Beta, Lethal Xcess, Maze, Parasol Stars, Reeking Rubber, Titan, To Be On Top, Warp, Xenon 2

Fixed Demos : 4-pixel plasma screen by TOS Crew, HighResMode by Paradox, It’s A Girl 2 by Paradox, Pacemaker by Paradox, Panic by Paulo Simoes, Shforstv.prg by Paulo Simoes, Sommarhack 2011 Invitro by DHS, Stax Compilation #65, The Union Demo, The World Is My Oyster, Tymewarp, UMD 8730 by PHF, IKBD no jitter by Nyh

Steve Jobs Had BETTER BALLS Than Atari, Says Apple Mouse Designer

Steve Jobs was well known for the size of his cojones, but it turns out that his former employer Atari had even better balls than him.

In fact, it was these balls that inspired the first ever Apple mouse, the man who designed the first fruity iRodent has confessed.

Jim Yurchenco, a retired engineer now in his dotage, was part of the design team that worked on the mouse which controlled the Apple Lisa.

He shared a few of his memories with Wired as he prepared to hang up his stylus.

At the time of the Apple mouse saga, Yurchenco was a fresh-faced Stanford graduate working for startup design agency Hovey-Kelley, co-founded by his old university pal David Kelley and one Dean Hovey, who happened to be a friend of Steve Jobs. Yurchenco was tasked with creating a control device after Jobs spotted a Xerox mouse during a tour of its facilities.

It was obviously way too complicated for what Jobs needed, which was a really low cost, easily manufacturable, reproducible product for consumers, Yurchenco remembered.

Naturally, what Jobs wanted, Jobs got. Yurchenco went away and analysed the trackball used on Atari arcade games in the hope of designing a better, cheaper mouse. The Atari machine used optics to track the ball’s movement, which required fewer moving parts, and was generally simpler than the $400 Xerox gizmo.

In contrast to the arcade giant’s ball of joy, the Xerox mouse used a complex mechanism which required a small ball to be pushed down on the tabletop. Its movement was then measured by a complex array of mechanical switches. While this solved the problem, it was still far too complicated to meet Jobs’ specification.

Yurchenco was, however, impressed by the Atari model and decided to use it as inspiration to create his own model.

Just like so many people we all know and love, the designer wasn’t really bothered about pinpoint accuracy - something that is important when assassinating virtual enemies, but not so important when trying to open a word processor.

Suddenly we realized, you don t care if it s accurate! Yurchenco added. It s like driving a car. You don t look at where you re turning the steering wheel, you turn the steering wheel until the car goes where you

want.

The relative simplicity of this design meant the mouse was cheaper to produce - a boon for Apple.

It was a couple of very simple insights, when you get down to it, that drove how the thing would behave, Yurchenco added. And that determined how you d design it.

The resulting design, which used a rolling ball along with light-based detectors, went on to inspire more progeny than even the horniest rodent could hope to leave behind.

They had a pretty good run. There were probably billions of those suckers made, Yurchenco snickered.

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - GTA 5's Next Online Update!
Atari's Bringing Back Haunted House!
'Game On' At Denny's!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

GTA 5's Next Online Update Brings Flight School and Gameplay Changes

Rockstar announced the latest free update for Grand Theft Auto V's multiplayer component, Grand Theft Auto Online, and it focuses primarily on flying.

Launching tomorrow, August 19, the San Andreas Flight School update will introduce new jets and helicopters (for use in new "aerial solo challenges"), as well as new land vehicles. There will also be new parachute designs based on various countries' flags - including the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom - and it looks as if new, Air Force-style attire will be available, too. The trailer gives a brief overview of what to expect, and Rockstar promises there will be "much more" than what it's detailed today.

Also included in the update are a variety of changes to GTA Online. The two provided examples of this are bigger rewards for completing more difficult missions and bonus in-game money for playing missions with other players. Further details will be announced when the update goes live tomorrow.

This is the latest in a series of free updates for GTA Online. It is not,

however, the one that’s been most highly anticipated since launch: online heists. Those were expected to be out this spring, but were delayed in June because they are "taking more time to create" than anticipated. A new release date for online heists have yet to be announced; likewise, we don’t yet know when the first expansion to the game’s single-player mode is expected.

The San Andreas Flight School update will be available tomorrow on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. Xbox One, PlayStation 4, and PC versions of GTA V will be released this fall with enhanced visuals, increased draw distances, and new wildlife.

No WiiU Version for ’Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare’

Game publisher Activision has decided not to release the next installment in its popular shooter series on Nintendo’s next-generation console. "Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare" is due for launch on November 4 for Xbox One, PlayStation 4 and PC.

Michael Condrey, who co-founded Sledgehammer Games and is developing the latest "Call of Duty" game, announced the news on Twitter, adding that it was Activision’s decision to forgo a WiiU version and focus instead on Microsoft and Sony’s next-generation consoles and PC.

The decision makes sense in light of dismal sales figures for the WiiU versions of the previous two "Call of Duty" games, "Black Ops II" and "Ghosts." The second to last game in the franchise barely sold over 170,000 copies on the WiiU worldwide.

The announcement is yet another blow to Nintendo’s console following the news that Ubisoft will no longer develop its "mature" games such as "Assassin’s Creed Unity" for the WiiU due to weak sales.

Launched in December 2012, the next-generation console has been no match for its competitors, the Playstation 4 and the Xbox One. Sony’s console, for example, has sold 10 million units worldwide since its release in November 2013, compared to just 6.6 million Nintendo WiiU consoles sold since December 2012.

Atari’s Bringing Back Haunted House and Alone in the Dark This Fall

Atari is tapping its back catalog for two new "re-imagined" horror games based on Haunted House and Alone in the Dark, the company announced today. Both are coming to PC this fall.

The new Haunted House the fourth game to be published by Atari under that name is in development at Italian studio Dreampainters, creators of PC horror game Anna. Dreampainters announced last year it was developing a follow-up to Anna called White Heaven, which is set in the same universe. White Heaven was originally planned for release in early 2014, but the studio hasn’t provided update on the horror adventure since May. Dreampainters founder Allesandro Monopoli said earlier this year that his studio was working on a "total reboot" of an older property from a major publisher.

Atari released the original Haunted House in 1982 for Atari 2600. A new game bearing that name was released for Windows PC, Wii and Xbox 360 in 2010. Earlier this year, mobile developer Kung Fu Factory released another Haunted House a cartoonish side-scrolling platformer for iOS.

Alone in the Dark: Illumination, Atari's other horror brand revitalization, is in development at Pure, according to its teaser website. The original Alone in the Dark was released in 1992 by Atari owner Infogrames. The most recent entry was released under the same name in 2008 for PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, Wii, Windows PC and Xbox 360.

Atari says it will show the new Haunted House and Alone in the Dark: Illumination at PAX Prime later this month. Atari announced last week that it will release RollerCoaster Tycoon World for PC in 2015.

SCEJ President Hiroshi Kawano Retiring

President and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment Japan, Hiroshi Kawano, is retiring from his position and the company on August 31, Sony Computer Entertainment announced today.

Since joining Sony in 1985, Kawano oversaw operations of the corporation in various capacities, such as general manager of Sony Europe and senior vice president of Consumer Sales. During his tenure at the company, spanning almost three decades, Kawano was instrumental in the launches and related product announcements of Sony s latest console offerings, such as the PlayStation Vita and the PlayStation 4.

Effective September 1, Atsushi Morita will succeed Kawano as president of SCEJ. Morita formally served Sony as vice president of administration and control. As for the rapidly approaching Tokyo Game Show, Morita will have to step into the shoes of Kawano, the usual stalwart figurehead of Sony-related announcements during the video game convention.

TGS 2014 runs from September 18-21 at the Makuhari Messe Convention Centre, Chiba, Japan where Sony is expected unveil some new PS4 games. We will be in attendance to bring you all the news and videos.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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'Game On' At Denny's With Exclusive Atari Contest

Denny's and Atari, one of the world's most recognized publishers and producers of interactive entertainment, are upping the competition around the new remixed arcade games "Hashteroids" and "Centipup." Fans across the country are invited to fight for gaming supremacy and enter in the

"Arcade Battle Royale" for the chance to win a trip to Las Vegas to compete in the ultimate gameplay contest.

Now through Sept. 11, fans may enter the contest using Denny's "Atari Remix" mobile game app, available for iPhone and Android devices. The two highest scorers of each game, challenged with flying hash browns and syrup bottle shooters, will win a three-day, two-night trip to Las Vegas to play in a head-to-head arcade battle on Sept. 23, as well as a $1,000 gift card. The grand prize winner of each diner battle will also take home an exclusive Atari game cabinet, customized with Denny's remixed mobile games so they can continue their quest to save the world, one Hashteroid at a time.

"This summer was all about extending the fun beyond our menu with a modern spin on gameplay that both new and existing Atari fans could enjoy," said John Dillon, @DillonJohnW, vice president of marketing for Denny's. "Even though the season is coming to an end, we want to continue the celebration by challenging true gamers to compete in the ultimate arcade contest and crown the 'Arcade Battle Royale' champion!"

Those not in a gaming mood may still enjoy a taste of remixed classics with Denny's limited time "Greatest Hits Remixed" menu, featuring a selection of the diner's iconic dishes, including the new Red White and Blue Slam, Baja Moons Over My Hammy and Tuscan Super Bird, all with a delicious new twist.

For more information about Denny's Atari partnership or limited time "Greatest Hits Remixed" menu, please visit www.dennys.com.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Hackers Attack Nuclear Regulatory Commission 3 Times in 3 Years

The organization overseeing the safety of U.S. nuclear reactors has fallen victim to overseas hackers three times in the past three years.

Citing an internal investigation, the Nextgov website reports that computers at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission were successfully hacked on three occasions.

Two of the attacks were conducted by foreigners and a third came from an unidentifiable individual, according to Nextgov, which obtained an Office of Inspector General report through an open-records request.

Experts say that foreign powers could use the NRC's sensitive information for surveillance or even sabotage, although the Commission says that the handful of attacks were detected and dealt with.

In one incident, which was traced to a hacker in an unnamed foreign

country, emails were sent to about 215 NRC employees in "a logon-credential harvesting attempt," according to the Inspector General report. Employees were invited to verify their user accounts by clicking a link and logging in, with victims taken to "a cloud-based Google spreadsheet." A dozen NRC employees clicked the link.

NRC spokesman David McIntyre told FoxNews.com that, based on the mere fact of clicking on the link, the Commission cleaned their systems and changed their user profiles. What the employees put on the spreadsheet is unknown, he added.

The Inspector General report also said that hackers attacked NRC employees with spearphishing emails linked to malicious software. Investigators wrote that a URL embedded in the emails linked to "a cloud-based Microsoft Skydrive storage site," which held the malware. There was one incident of compromise, according to the report, with the attack also traced to an unnamed foreign country.

In another incident, hackers broke into the personal email account of an NRC employee and sent malware in the form of an infected PDF attachment to 16 other workers in the employee s contact list.

NRC spokesman David McIntyre told FoxNews.com that only one of the 16 workers opened the attachment, causing their computer to become infected and subsequently replaced.

Experts say that the incidents reinforce the need for extra-tight security within organizations. As can be seen from the Skydrive and Email incidents, it only takes one wrong click to give attackers access the keys to the kingdom , wrote Tal Klein, vice president of Strategy at Palo Alto, Calif.-based cloud security specialist Adallom, in a statement emailed to FoxNews.com. These sort of advanced phishing attacks go under the radar, undetectable by traditional endpoint protection and network firewalls, similar to the Ice Dagger attack we uncovered last year.

In the cyber era of numerous state-sponsored targeted attacks with the motive of cyber espionage, surveillance, or sabotage, it is not very surprising that Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has been targeted multiple times, added Deepen Desai, director of security research for San Jose, Calif.-based Zscaler ThreatLabZ, in an emailed statement. The sensitive information maintained by NRC will be of prime interest to some foreign states with the motives ranging from espionage, surveillance, or sabotage. This makes it very important for the organizations like NRC that maintains nation s critical infrastructure information to not only continuously train their employees but also update their training content more frequently.

NRC spokesman McIntyre told FoxNews.com that the Commission is always concerned about the potential for cyber intrusions into its networks.
Every NRC employee completes mandatory annual training on computer security that covers phishing, spear phishing and other attempts to gain illicit access to agency networks, he said. The NRC s Computer Security Office detects and thwarts the vast majority of such attempts, through a strong firewall and reporting by NRC employees.
The few attempts documented in the OIG Cyber Crimes Unit report as gaining some access to NRC networks were detected and appropriate measures were taken, he added.

Overseas cyberattacks have been attracting plenty of attention recently.

Earlier this month, for example, research specialist Hold Security, which has a strong track record of uncovering data breaches, reported that a Russian crime ring has got its hands on more than a billion stolen Internet credentials.

This was followed by news that U.S. Investigation Services (USIS), the main provider of background checks to the U.S. government, had been targeted in an attack possibly launched by a foreign power.

Chinese Hackers Stole Information on 4.5 Million U.S. Hospital Patients

Between April and June, hackers broke into a large U.S. hospital system and stole identify information on 4.5 million patients, according to a document filed with the SEC.

Community Health Systems operates 206 hospitals in 29 states, with a particularly large presence in the Southwest, reports Re/Code s Arik Hesseldahl, who broke the news on this attack.

The hackers were tracked to China, the hospital says.

While the hackers didn t get any credit card info, they did get patient names, addresses, birth dates, telephone numbers and social security numbers, the hospital revealed.

The hospital says the hack was something called an advanced persistent threat (APT) which is when hackers go after a target deliberately, using all kinds of methods to break in, sometimes spending months or longer on the attack. That s different from something called a drive-by attack which is the kind of malware that works randomly, when you visit an infected website or open an infected email.

APT is a very difficult kind of hack to stop, so the company hired a security firm famous for protecting against this kind of threat, Mandiant. It also worked with federal law enforcement, it said.

Mandiant came to fame when it revealed research on a Chinese military cyberwar unit accused of attacking the networks of more than 100 companies looking for trade secrets. China has officially denied these accusations, but Mandiant s research was taken seriously by the U.S. Department of Justice. In May, the DoJ indicted five Chinese military hackers for breaking into U.S. corporations in the energy industry.

While the disclosure of a hack affecting 4.5 million patents is not good for Community Health Systems or its patients, it is something of a much-needed PR coup for security company FireEye. FireEye acquired Mandiant for $1 billion in January, and shortly after that, investors went wild for the company, driving its stock up to over $97 by March. FireEye had only launched as a public company in a few months earlier, in September 2013.

But when FireEye warned investors that it wouldn t grow as fast as it had hoped, the stock crashed big time and is now trading at about $30.

In the meantime, if you ve been to a hospital in the past couple of months, you might want to double-check if it was one in the Community Health System network. And then you would be wise to watch for signs of

identity theft.

NSA and GCHQ Employees May Be Undermining The Agencies' Work To Hack Tor

It's no secret that US and British spy agencies are trying to crack the Tor network, but new information suggests that the agencies' floundering efforts may be sabotaged from within. For the uninitiated, Tor is a web browser that anonymizes a person's identity, location and browsing activity using various technologies - it's also a known gateway to the so-called "dark-web" that hosts sites like the Silk Road. Naturally, spy organizations see it as a threat, but the Tor Project's Andrew Lewman says some of the agencies' employees are undermining their own hacking efforts. "There are plenty of people in both organizations who can anonymously leak data to us and say, maybe you should look ere, maybe you should fix this," he told the BBC in a recent interview. "And they have."

Technically, Lewman can't know if these suggestions are coming from spy agencies, but he says it makes sense. Tor's anonymous bug reporting system makes it impossible to tell where the reports come from, but the issues that are coming in are so granular, he says, they have to be coming from users who have spent hundreds of hours scrutinizing Tor's source code. "It's a hung," Lewman admits, but he's convinced its accurate. NSA whistleblower William Binney has reportedly told Lewman that NSA employees are upset by the organizations activity recently, and may be leaking data to Tor as a subtle retaliation. Naturally, neither the NSA or GCHQ commented on the matter - but the possibility of spies undermining themselves for the sake of ethics is fascinating. Check out the full interview below.

NSA and GCHQ Agents 'Leak Tor Bugs', Alleges Developer

British and American intelligence agents attempting to hack the "dark web" are being deliberately undermined by colleagues, it has been alleged.

Spies from both countries have been working on finding flaws in Tor, a popular way of anonymously accessing "hidden" sites.

But the team behind Tor says other spies are tipping them off, allowing them to quickly fix any vulnerabilities.

The agencies declined to comment.

The allegations were made in an interview given to the BBC by Andrew Lewman, who is responsible for all the Tor Project's operations.

He said leaks had come from both the UK Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and the US National Security Agency (NSA).

By fixing these flaws, the project can protect users' anonymity, he said. "There are plenty of people in both organisations who can anonymously leak data to us to say - maybe you should look here, maybe you should look at this to fix this," he said. "And they have."

Mr Lewman is part of a team of software engineers responsible for the Tor Browser - software designed to prevent it being possible to trace users' internet activity. The programs involved also offer access to otherwise hard-to-reach websites, some of which are used for illegal purposes.

The dark web, as it is known, has been used by paedophiles to share child abuse imagery, while online drug marketplaces are also hosted on the hidden sites.

Mr Lewman said that his organisation received tips from security agency sources on "probably [a] monthly" basis about bugs and design issues that potentially could compromise the service.

However, he acknowledged that because of the way the Tor Project received such information, he could not prove who had sent it.

"It's a hunch," he said. "Obviously we are not going to ask for any details.

"You have to think about the type of people who would be able to do this and have the expertise and time to read Tor source code from scratch for hours, for weeks, for months, and find and elucidate these super-subtle bugs or other things that they probably don't get to see in most commercial software.

"And the fact that we take a completely anonymous bug report allows them to report to us safely."

He added that he had been told by William Binney, a former NSA official turned whistleblower, that one reason NSA workers might have leaked such information was because many were "upset that they are spying on Americans".

In response, a spokesman from the NSA public affairs office said: "We have nothing for you on this one."

A spokesman for GCHQ said: "It is long-standing policy that we do not comment on intelligence matters. Furthermore, all of GCHQ's work is carried out in accordance with a strict legal and policy framework, which ensures that our activities are authorised, necessary and proportionate."

The BBC understands, however, that GCHQ does attempt to monitor a range of anonymisation services to identify and track down suspects involved in the online sexual exploitation of children, among other crimes.

The reporter Glenn Greenwald has also published several articles, based on documents released by the whistleblower Edward Snowden, alleging that both agencies have attempted to crack Tor as part of efforts to prevent terrorism.

A security expert who has done consultancy work for GCHQ said he was amazed by Mr Lewman's allegation, but added that it was not "beyond the bounds of possibility.

"It's not surprising that agencies all over the world will be looking for weaknesses in Tor," said Alan Woodward.

"But the fact that people might then be leaking that to the Tor Project so that it can undo it would be really very serious.

"So if that is happening, then those organisations are going to take this very seriously."

Tor was originally designed by the US Naval Research Laboratory, and continues to receive funding from the US State Department.

It is used by the military, activists, businesses and others to keep communications confidential and aid free speech.

But it has also been used to organise the sale of illegal drugs, host malware, run money laundering services, and traffic images of child abuse and other illegal pornography.

Mr Lewman said that his organisation provided advice to law enforcement agencies, including the FBI and the UK Serious Crime Agency (Soca), to help them understand how Tor worked in order to aid their investigations.

But he criticised cyberspies who carried out orders to undermine Tor’s protections.

"We are around 30 people in total, and think of the NSA or GCHQ with their tens of thousands of employees and billions of pounds of budget," he said.

"The odds there are obviously in their favour.

"It’s sort of funny because it also came out that GCHQ heavily relies on Tor working to be able to do a lot of their operations.

"So you can imagine one part of GCHQ is trying to break Tor, the other part is trying to make sure it’s not broken because they’re relying on it to do their work.

"So it’s typical within governments, or even within large agencies, that you have two halves of the same coin going after different parts of Tor. Some protect it, some to try to attack it."

He added that the Tor browser had been downloaded 150 million times in the past year, and that it currently supported about 2.5 million users a day.

"Hundreds of millions of people are now relying on Tor," Mr Lewman said, "in some cases in life-and-death situations. And that’s what we pay attention to.

"We would be very sad if anyone was arrested, tortured and killed because of some software bug or because of some design decision we made that put them at risk."

Mr Lewman will deliver the keynote speech at the Broadband World Forum event in Amsterdam in October.

Who are the cyberspies?

The Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) employs about 5,000 people and has two key roles:

To identify threats from intercepted communications. It says these include terrorism, the spread of nuclear weapons, regional conflicts around the world and threats to the economic prosperity of the UK.

To serve as an authority on information assurance - meaning that it advises the government and organisations running the UK's critical infrastructure how to safeguard their systems from interference and disruption.

It dates back to 1919, when it was called the Government Code and Cypher School. It adopted its current name in 1946. The foreign secretary is answerable in Parliament for GCHQ's work.

The National Security Agency (NSA) gathers intelligence for the US government and military leaders.

It is also has the task of preventing foreign adversaries gaining access to classified national security information.

It employs about 35,000 workers, both civilians and military.

Google Eyes Kid-Friendly Accounts

Hey, kids. If you're bummed because you're too young to create a Google account, we have some potentially good news.

The Web giant is reportedly working on versions of YouTube and Gmail that are specifically geared towards children. If Google goes through with the plan, it would be the first time the company has offered accounts to children under 13 years old, according to The Wall Street Journal, citing unnamed people familiar with Google's plans.

Google declined to comment about the report when contacted by PCMag on Tuesday.

Currently, children are not allowed to sign up for a Gmail or YouTube account because the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) puts strict limits on how information about children under 13 is collected for advertising. If you're under 13, Google will redirect you to a page stating it could not create your account because you do not meet the age requirement. However, there's nothing really stopping children from masquerading as adults to create an account.

The new system would let parents set up accounts for their children, as well as control how their youngsters use the services and what information is collected about them, so they are compliant with COPPA.

According to tech news site The Information, which first reported on the company's plans to embrace the younger age group, Google has already been working on a kid-friendly version of YouTube. As part of the move, Google will also introduce a dashboard where parents can oversee their kids' activities.

Back in 2011, Facebook chief Mark Zuckerberg made headlines when he said that kids under 13 should be allowed on the site. But COPPA has thus far stood in the way of any major action on that front.

The FTC updated COPPA in 2012 for the digital age, outlining how websites, apps, and third-party networks should handle the personal information of children. It had not been updated since 1998 before Facebook, Twitter, or

smartphones. For more, check out New Rules on Kids' Online Privacy Require Adults to Pay Attention.

Stop Hating on Facebook s Like Button

There seems to be a war on the Facebook Like happening these days. The latest salvo: a Chrome extension, Neutralike, that eliminates the familiar Like option from your Facebook News Feed. If one of your friends there posts something you like, you ll have to say so in words, not with a click.

The primary intent, Neutralike creator Adam Powers explained to The Atlantic, is that I can no longer just click Like to show my approval for something. I have to comment, even if it s a one-word response or a me too. And I like it like that.

This follows recent journalistic stunts meant to examine the meaning of Like: One writer liked everything he saw on Facebook for 48 hours; another liked nothing for two weeks. Both emerged questioning the wisdom of Likes. And, as The Atlantic noted, Like-removal has been explored before.

But here s the thing: I like Like. Here s why.

This morning I gave Neutralike a whirl. I basically visit Facebook once a day, in the morning, mostly just scrolling through my Close Friends list, and a group or two. Today, one friend made a particularly witty remark, and another posted a link to a cool artist-book-making event in Houston.

Normally, this is stuff I would have liked. Today I couldn t.

The question is, what value would come from instead posting a comment? That was a very witty remark! or even just LOL. Doesn t that add to the useless clutter of non-communication that is the bane of social media in general? How, exactly, is Me, too a more meaningful and engaging response than clicking Like?

For actual social interaction, with actual friends, Like is incredibly useful. Sure: It seems like a dumbing-down of communication, a digital grunt of approval. Agreed: Responding to a friend s major life events (a new baby or something) with a Like seems like a degradation of human interaction.

But the existence of a Like button doesn t prevent you from saying something more when that is called for. And sometimes a simple Like is perfectly appropriate.

I really didn t have anything articulate to say about that book-making event in Texas, and it certainly wasn t worth anyone s time to have some kind of ginned-up conversation about it. (Hey, that s awesome. Thanks for posting! Yer welcome! and so on.) So I just kept scrolling. And my friend who linked to it has no way of knowing that her post improved my morning.

Much of the recent grousing over the Facebook Like has centered on what it does to your News Feed. Possibly the Like really does screw up the

kind of current-events-related links Facebook s algorithm chooses to show you. But that s a different argument.

Here s a pro tip: If you want to keep up with the news, visit a news site.

Neutralike is a perfectly worthy experiment, and I m sympathetic to Powers thinking, but I ll be turning the extension off shortly. Then I ll go like friends witty remarks and cool links, and they ll know I like what they ve posted, and nothing further needs to be added.

That doesn t undercut connection with far-flung friends. It creates it. Which is exactly what I like about Like.

Apple Gives Beta Users A Peek at OS X Yosemite

Apple is no longer afraid of the word "beta."

Breaking with its notorious code of secrecy, Apple is letting users test-drive its new operating system for the Mac before it is officially launched later this fall. For the first time, the Cupertino-based company unveiled a free beta version of its upcoming OS X Yosemite software to the general public late last month along with a parallel version for developers that was updated Monday, setting the Apple blogosphere afire.

Users often get to test new services from Google before they are finalized, but it’s a rare perk from Apple, which typically limits its beta releases to registered developers. By giving the public an early look at Yosemite, Apple is showing a greater appreciation for beta testing, said Carolina Milanesi, chief of research and head of U.S. business at Kantar Worldpanel ComTech, a consumer research firm.

"It may be a bit of a different Apple," she said, adding that the company now seems to understand that releasing a beta version "doesn’t say that their attention to detail has changed.... It’s just that they are seeking feedback."

With beta testing, companies can deploy users to spot kinks in software before it debuts. After the troubled 2012 launch of Apple Maps, which set off a deluge of user complaints and forced an apology from CEO Tim Cook, Apple may be trying to avoid another "gotcha" moment, said analyst Van Baker with Gartner Research.

"This is sort of taking advantage of, in essence, the crowdsourcing approach to understand, ’Is there anything we missed?’" he said.

Apple last released a beta version of its software to the public in 2000, and users had to pay for it. The Yosemite beta program is open to the first one million people who sign up, though users must consent to a non-disclosure agreement.

Apple released a beta version of its upcoming iOS 8 software for iPhones and iPads to developers after the Worldwide Developers Conference in June, but the company has not opened up the software to the public.

The public beta program will also provide valuable feedback to the developer community, which Apple needs to keep happy as Google’s Android

operating system gains ground, said Milanesi.

"From a developer perspective, there’s an opportunity to deliver better products," she said.

Among other new features, the OS X Yosemite for Macs will allow users to begin a task on one Apple device and finish it on another, Apple has said. The iOS 8 system for iPhones and iPads will give developers new tools to create health and fitness apps.

Windows 9 Preview To Launch September 30

Code-named Threshold, Windows 9 is set to bring a major change in terms of design and features compared to Windows 8, which was launched less than two years ago.

According to sources within the company, speaking to well-known Microsoft-watcher Tom Warren at The Verge, the company is planning to hold a media event on Sept. 30 to unveil the new software, though that date could change in the coming weeks.

The news from Warren comes just days after fellow Microsoft expert Mary Jo Foley at ZDNet reported that the Redmond-based company was planning to make a technology preview of Windows 9 available in late September/early October.

Threshold as the software is currently known within Microsoft is set to be the next major release of the company s desktop software and will be known as Windows 9 when it officially launches in the spring of 2015.

Microsoft is said to be focusing more on making the new Windows experience better for those using non-touch devices, with Windows 8 roundly criticized by mouse and keyboard users for being too touch-focused.

Microsoft began to address these concerns with the Windows 8.1 update last year, and this will continue with Windows 9.

Among the additions to feature in the Windows 9 release:

- A mini Start menu returning to the desktop?
- Windowed Metro-style apps?
- Virtual desktops?
- Cortana integration?
- Removal of the Charm bar

Microsoft has stated its intention of having a much more rapid update cycle for Windows software, similar to its update cycle for Windows Phone mobile software.

With that in mind, the preview set to become available at the end of September is likely to be accessible not just to developers but to the public as well, unlike the Windows 8 preview, which was initially available only to developers.

Internet Outages Expected To Abate As Routers Are Modified, Rebooted

A flood of updates to databases inside Internet routers caused intermittent outages on Wednesday and connectivity issues for companies, but experts expect the long-forecasted hiccup to be resolved soon.

Internet traffic is designed to flow in the most efficient way, which means frequent updates to routers that describe how networks should connect. Some routers can only accommodate 512,000 of those updates in memory without further tweaks.

Some of those routers have hit their limit, which caused some networks to go offline. The situation, while inconvenient for some, is being regarded as more of a technical bump rather than the meltdown of the Internet, but one that may keep network operators on their toes for the next few days.

"This situation is more of an annoyance than a real Internet-wide threat," wrote Jim Cowie of Dyn. "Most routers in use today...have plenty of room to deal with the Internet’s current span." Dyn acquired Cowie’s network performance company Renesys in May.

Cisco warned its customers as early as May that the rising number of route entries could pose trouble, wrote Omar Santos, incident manager for the company’s Product Security Incident Response Team, in a blog post Wednesday.

In just six years, the number of entries in routing tables has doubled, from 256,000 to upwards of 512,000, he wrote. The problem is that as routing entries exceed 512,000, the Ternary Content Addressable Memory (TCAM) contained in switches and routers will run out unless modified. TCAM is a type of memory that is faster than RAM, Santos wrote.

Older products from Cisco are configured by default to only accommodate 512,000 routes. Products that may be affected include the company’s Catalyst 6500 switches, 7600 series routers, ASR 9000 and 1000 Series Aggregation Services Routers in certain configurations. Cisco has published workarounds for that equipment.

The flurry of routing changes appeared to have originated from two networks run by Verizon, wrote Andree Toonk, founder of BGPmon, a network monitoring and security company in Vancouver. The changes from Verizon appear to have pushed global routing tables to 515,000 entries, past the default limit for some types of equipment, he wrote.

Verizon appeared to make some changes that lowered the number of routes, which fixed some issues. But "the Internet routing table will continue to grow organically and we will reach the 512,000 limit soon again," Toonk wrote. Verizon did not have an immediate comment.

The Lansing, Michigan, based Web hosting provider Liquid Web moved quickly after it experienced issues. It upgraded the memory allocation to its core routers as well as rebooted some, the company wrote on its support blog.

Google’s IPO Celebrates 10th Birthday

It s been 10 years since the initial public offering of the dominant search company, and how it s grown up.

Google s rise to power has been so swift and breathtaking, it s shaken up the world order of the advertising industry, disrupted the technology industry and turned into a massive money maker for investors.

While the advertising company first rose to the fore due to its super-secret search algorithm, Google has used its power to collect vast amounts of data about its users and apply it to new areas. Google has pushed into new industries including mobile, where it is dominant, and also software systems.

For investors, the Internet advertising firm s success has been astounding. Google is the 11th best performing stock in the current Standard & Poor s 500 since its Aug. 19, 2004, IPO, gaining 30.15% a year on average, says Howard Silverblatt, strategist at S&P Dow Jones Indices.

Google s IPO broke the mold from the very start. Advised by academics, Google sold shares using the Dutch Auction model, where all potential buyers used an online system to indicate how many shares they wanted and at what price. The IPO establishment was outraged since they did not get the preferential treatment and power to dole out shares to their own clients.

The founders also found themselves in a bit of trouble at the time of the IPO when they appeared in Playboy magazine with an interview prior to the offering. It was quickly resolved with a press release and update to the registration documents.

Recently, the company orchestrated a complex stock split, which created another class of stock. Some declared the move, which concentrates more voting power in the hands of founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, as anti-investor. But the company is so profitable, investors can t resist holding it.

Many people may consider Google to be a technology company, but its secret to success is that it is an advertising company. Google uses its technology products as a way to lure more users from which the company can collect data and sell information about them to the highest bidder. More than 60% of the value of Google s stock price comes from advertising, delivered both on desktop computers and on mobile devices, says stock information firm Trefis.

These data and Google s dominant position on the Web with its services gives it so much power, it s very difficult to compete against. Media magnate Rupert Murdock this weekend again groused at how powerful Google has become with a post on Twitter.

Google s business model might be difficult for consumers to understand. But it allows the company to offer products at no cost that a traditional software company would charge money for. And those data, it seems, are worth more than the price of the software and services being given away for free.

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